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THE ATLANTA CONSTITUTION
16 MAY 1977SENATORS MULL CHANGE

Intelligence Powers May Be Centralized

WASHINGTON — The Senate Intelligence Committee, after a year of activity that has been almost as secretive as the agencies it monitors, is considering concentrating the authority for the nation's entire intelligence in a single office known as a "Director of National Intelligence."

In the past, the head of the Central Intelligence Agency also has carried the title of "Director of Central Intelligence," but has lacked meaningful control over large segments of the intelligence community, particularly the National Security Agency and other agencies housed within the Department of Defense.

Senior senators on the committee, which is ready to go public with a series of hearing, recommendations, bills and reports that could reshape the intelligence community and set the pattern of congressional oversight for years to come, said that the present thinking of the committee was that the new "Director of National Intelligence" should have control of the NSA and its worldwide communications intercept and code-breaking activities.

"We'd have to give him the tools he'd need to run the entire operation, and that includes budget authority"

and to set priorities, said Sen. Walter D. Huddleston. "We can't place the responsibility on him without giving him the authority," he said.

In the months ahead, the committee plans to hold hearings on secrecy and espionage laws, report on the quality of intelligence-gathering about China and the Soviet Union, draft a new legislative charter for the Central Intelligence Agency, and reveal a lump-sum figure of the cost of intelligence.

"We are going to propose an in-depth and massive restructuring of our laws," Sen. Daniel K. Inouye, D-Hawaii, the committee chairman, said recently.

The oversight committee, created after a select committee headed by Sen. Frank Church, D-Idaho, documented scores of improper and illegal acts by the nation's intelligence community, will mark its first anniversary Thursday with a report to the Senate on the activities of its first year.

The report is expected to be general in nature, and not to discuss in any detail the covert operations the committee has examined or the allegations it has probed. But it is

expected to contain a strong statement by the subcommittee on Rights of Americans, headed by Sen. Birch Bayh, D-Ind., that pledges the committee to, as Bayh put it, "establish the rule of law in intelligence activities and law enforcement."

In a series of interviews last week, Inouye and the chairmen of his six subcommittees insisted that the intelligence agencies had given them good cooperation to date, and that the experience of the first year suggests that serious congressional oversight is possible.

They indicated that they have come to agree that the intelligence agencies are vital, that there are legitimate "national security" secrets to be guarded, and that there are important "national security" operations to be conducted.

But they also agreed that major decisions and debates lie ahead, and that the coming year could be crucial in determining what the future of congressional oversight will be.

"We have the capability, but the question is whether we will write the laws tight enough," said Sen. Joseph R. Biden, D-Del. "If we don't codify the rights of Americans, and if we don't define in law just what the

(intelligence agencies) can and can't do... the ball game is over as far as oversight is concerned."

In general, the intelligence community would prefer only broad guidelines, while some of the critics of past abuses argue that the charter should contain the specific recommendations of the Church Committee, which were designed to control covert operations abroad, and to place tight restrictions on domestic political spying at home.

"We would be inclined to be very specific," Huddleston said. "But it is natural that the executive branch would like to be as flexible as possible."

Military intelligence sources said Sunday that any attempt to shift control of NSA away from the Defense Department would likely encounter resistance at the Pentagon, which would argue that it could not obtain the tactical intelligence it needs if NSA were reoriented toward a "national intelligence" mission.

But several committee members said that there was some support for reshaping the entire intelligence operation in the years ahead to give less emphasis to tactical intelligence and more to national intelligence vital to foreign policy and economic policy.